

NURSING OF THE INSANE A PART OF A THREE YEARS' COURSE *

BY MARY E. MAY, R.N.

Graduate of the Rochester City Hospital; Matron and Superintendent of Nurses at the State Hospital, Rochester, N. Y.; Member of the Board of Nurse Examiners, New York State

If all general hospitals having a three years' course would supplement instruction in the theory of mental nursing by arrangements for their student nurses to spend three months, during the last year and a half of their training, in a hospital for the insane in the wards of the acute and infirmary services, it seems to the writer that the benefit accruing to all concerned would amply repay the labor which such an arrangement would necessarily entail.

Some time in the first year and a half of their course, lectures should be given in the general hospital by an alienist, who is regularly lecturing to nurses in training in a hospital for the insane. Quizzes could be held and papers could be examined by the regular teaching staff of the general hospital.

During the three months' service on the wards of a hospital for the insane, the nurses would become familiar with the most advanced methods in the nursing of the different psychoses and their etiology. This knowledge would help them to recognize conditions outside the hospitals which, if continued, might lead to serious, nervous breakdown.

Frequently general hospital graduates are called upon to nurse borderland cases in private homes and, with an experience gained by actually having cared for insane patients, this responsibility could be assumed with greater confidence on the part of the nurse and of the physician employing her.

Medical colleges are paying more attention now than formerly to instructing their students in nervous and mental diseases, and physicians will expect nurses to know more about this special branch of nursing than they can possibly know without having actually worked among the insane.

Graduates of general hospitals are sometimes sought for executive and teaching positions in hospitals for the insane and if experience in the wards of such hospitals has been a part of their training, it will be

* Read at the eleventh annual convention of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae, San Francisco, May, 1908.

much easier for them to take up their work. Such experience would be particularly valuable in any alcoholie, drug or toxic case.

An article in "Charities and the Commons" for March 7, 1908, says of the state institutions in Illinois, "Training schools for nurses and attendants have been established, superintendents of nurses in charge of both men and women patients have been appointed, a system of affiliation with general hospitals has been inaugurated whereby the general hospitals will put mental nursing into their courses as an optional study, and training will be given to under-graduate nurses from the general hospital training schools in the state institutions."

It seems to the writer that unless practical nursing of the insane be made an obligatory part of the general hospital course, few, if any, nurses will elect it, probably thinking that work among the insane would be entirely out of their ordinary routine in both student and graduate days.

Another good that might come from such an arrangement is that the vacancies caused in the student nursing service of the general hospitals could be filled by nurses from the hospitals for the insane, who could thereby increase their experience in surgical and obstetrical nursing.

In New York State, all appointments in the state hospital service are made according to civil service rules, and arrangements for the interchange of nurses would have to be made with the Civil Service Commission wherever such rules obtain. This administrative detail could be thought out and arranged by the local municipal, county or state boards for each hospital community.

A broad discussion of this subject by all interested in comprehensive care of the sick and incapacitated would doubtless open up avenues for the consummation of twentieth century ideals in nursing.



THAT contagion may come, not merely on the wings of the wind, but in a cup of cold water or of milk, in the caress of affection, on the hand of pity stretched out to save, upon the penitential garment, or even upon the sacramental communion cup or the broken bread—these ideas, dimly dreamed of in the past, are among the very corner-stones of sanitary knowledge to-day.—WILLIAM T. SEDGWICK in *Yale Medical Journal*.